

At this point, in previous inductions, I have tended to fill up the space with a potted autobiography. And yet, I'm not sure that's the best use of the "statement by the Candidate" in this service.

But just to get that out of the way. I'm 55. I'm a widower with two interesting and vulnerable teenagers. I have no doubt that their mother, my late partner in life and in ministry, would have been as excited with today as I am. I've got a postgrad digital art and design qualification as well as degrees in German and theology. I have been a minister in a variety of local churches for twenty three years.

And that is a full time job, even when job-sharing. So I haven't worked in any *explicitly* environmental *post* until now.

And yet, when a friend who knew *before* I was accepted for training, heard of *this* post, she reminded *me* how much this made sense to her from what she remembered of that strange young man in his mid twenties....

....Who then got into trouble at college, trying to use a course in systematic theology to do fashionable Creation Spirituality. Oxford University was having none of it. But I managed to *look* sensible enough to finish the course. And my final dissertation on the Spirituality of St Columba, crystallised for me the real treasure in Christianity, not just of the *Communion of Saints*, but of the *Communion of Creation*.

As well as, that it's *all there*, if we but look. Christian faith. Immersed in Creation, as a fish is in water. Invisible in plain sight.

When I visited the World Council of Churches, there was a couple going round challenging everyone. They would go up to folk and say

"Do you have a healing ministry back home?"

And *almost everyone*, being straight and sensible Christians would say "No, we don't"

And the couple said, *as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouth* "Oh, so you don't celebrate Holy Communion then?"

"Drink this, all of you, This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." [Matt 26:27]

Maybe *this* job is about asking everyday sensible Christians... *And even those in the frighteningly sensible discipline of training...*

"Do you make a point of care for Creation in your church back home?"

And if they say "*no*", then replying, *as if butter wouldn't melt in my mouth...*

"Oh you don't read the Bible, then?"

or

"Oh, you don't do Christianity, then?"

or

"Oh, you don't celebrate Holy Communion, then?"

"Blessed are you, Lord **God of All Creation**, through whose **Goodness** we have this **bread** and **wine** and **ourselves** to offer."

My conviction is that what Eco-Congregation is about will make you a *more catholic Catholic*, (and the Pope's already on board). It will make you a more *truly* evangelical evangelical, a *happier* presbyterian, (you see)! and keep reformers on the reforming path.

So, this *is* evangelism, evangelisation, totally coherent with the urgent, (no, desperate,) need for environmental action. We bring *the love-of-God-people* and the *justice-for-creation-people* together and shake them up so no one *need* tell the difference.

Through Eco-Congregation, it is *local* churches where the Green Christian revolution is taking place. *Local churches* who make available a nourishing spirituality to folk who don't need to be part of the elite.

Thank God for local churches. I hope I'll say that again in five years, when I try to find one to take me back.

A confession. By and large, with the **pressures** of local churches, I've sometimes been shamefully sensible and straight and decent myself.

So I begin with huge **sympathy** for anyone who might feel overwhelmed by the **inertia** of the churches, both at local and national level. But all work and no play...

Yes, I've got up to some stuff with the Iona Community, and represented the United Reformed Church at international gatherings. Travel - **focuses** - both mind and spirituality.As well as burning fossil fuels. Pray God I make my footprint worth it.

People have used my words, and even more, my images, in reflective and encouraging ways over all that time, and others too have noted - **more than I myself had noticed** - how my spirituality is nourished by encounter with wildness and wilderness.

My day-to-day work of struggling with Scripture led me to write and film reflections on the interface of faith and science, and one film I still need to get round to - is **Mark's** version of Jesus in **that** wilderness. In the "**land where it may rain, but no human lives there**". [cf **Job 38:26**] This is where the Holy Spirit drives Jesus, to prepare for his ministry.

Not so much desert-aridity, but rather the freedom from the distorting influence of sensible human society, is what defines wilderness. So there, the sensible prudent voice can be seen to be **the Satan** - read "the Opposition" - to what Jesus is about.

And there, the **early** witness of Mark brings Jesus not into conflict, but into **communion** with the creatures. It's a point illustrated by ancient depictions on high crosses and elsewhere.

English language **Bibles**, chose to present us, by sad contrast, with growling, toothy "**wild beasts**".

But read more closely, we're talking creatures which are **not** antagonistic, but simply not crushed by the '**dominion**' of humanity.

Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark doesn't seem to labour the point about **fasting**, either.

So, for Mark, Jesus didn't go out **in order to fast**, but to be **spiritually equipped**. He is **tested**.

And along with the fellowship of animals, Angels keep him going throughout the forty days.

We don't exist to **in order to** change our light bulbs to LEDs, but to be faithful in care **for and with** God's Creation.

Maybe Matthew and Luke felt the pressure to get through to sensible, cautious religious folk, and therefore **they** emphasised the authentic tradition of Christ's **hunger as** he was tested.

A friend from the **relative** "wilderness" of Iona said "**the island sorts people out**". And so, I like to think, it **is** the remoteness, the freedom from common sense, which **sorts Jesus out** to confront the demons of Empire.

'Sensible' voices have power: "Grant those fracking licences now: don't pass up the jobs, the prosperity. Never mind those hard-won emissions targets from your **regional** government. Don't drive cars off the road, just because they're diesel!.

Friends, my own car is going to be driven off the road, and much sooner than it might. Praise the Lord! In church and in society, we need to look both at carrots and sticks. To shift the stubborn ass. Making **big decisions is** terribly difficult, and our churches have long been content to let procrastination masquerade as spiritual wisdom.

In the last ten years, as the scientific evidence for accelerating climate crisis has advanced *way beyond* mere consensus, the strategies of Empire have been in overdrive to discredit and undermine the Advocates of the Earth.

Much damage *has* been done. And yet there is hope. Christians are a people of hope, against hope. Though hope has it hard, when truth is disregarded.

There are times in our lives when we come up for air, and others where we grasp what the Psalmist is on about when he croaks, about sinking into a muddy pit. We need to honour and cherish and learn from those bright *and* dark times in our lives, for, as my sending minister and mentor, the late Murdoch MacKenzie proclaimed at my *first* induction, "*where there is no vision, the people perish.*" Eco-Congregation *feeds* that life-giving vision.

In our lives and in our churches, we *shall* bring out of our stores, our spiritual environmental treasures both new and old. To urgently praise God with the commitment of our youth and of our maturity.

Treasures both previous and current. Back in 1995, Bungie shared the ministry of my sending church with Murdoch. Together, they helped me grasp the environmental thread, running through the heart of our faith. In fellowship with both, I ask God's help and all your support, to build on Trevor's five years, and begin to live up to *and hand on to many* the encouragement people have found in what must now be an *increasingly shared* vision of Environmental Chaplaincy.